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tied into a new conception of the meaning of life, death, heroism, service, and noblesse oblige. There are many signs that we shall not lapse back into the old grooves, but shall readjust our purposes and performance to harmonize with the new valuations the war has produced. If this shall be true, the constructive forces

of the nation—of which the library is surely one—will duplicate the energy and enthusiasm with which it is welcoming home its soldiers, in working for better conditions for their children, that they may carry into manhood and womanhood the strength and bravery which they have inherited.

GETTING BOOKS TO FARMERS IN CALIFORNIA

By MILTON J. FERGUSON, *Librarian, California State Library*

With the announcement in 1849 of the discovery of gold in California a great tide of emigrants set their faces westward. They went on horseback, in ox-drawn wagons, on foot, around the Horn, across the Isthmus; they went in great companies and in small groups. Eagerly, yearningly they pushed onward over boundless plains, through lofty, rugged and unmapped mountains, through forest and across desert. They were all classes, all creeds, men of good repute and men of ill. They were alike in buoyant energy, willingness to endure hardships in order to arrive soon and in confidence of ultimate success. The suffering, the weary dogged plodding of thousands finally wore trails and the trails became roads which men could travel with some assurance of reaching the journey's end. But whatever the business of the travelers, however diversified their opinions and their fortunes, they all in time gladly availed themselves of these main traveled roads.

In 1910 my state suddenly came to herself on the subject of highways. A comprehensive system of roads was presented and the people approved of the plan carrying with it an appropriation of \$18,000,000. Six years later this beginning in road making was further supplemented by an additional fund of \$15,000,000; and on July 1 the state will doubtless go over the top with a \$40,000,000 bond issue for the same purpose. One of our counties, the other day, voted \$4,800,000 to build county roads in addition to the broad ribbons of concrete which are being laid down by the

state from end to end of the commonwealth. And the people—townfolk and country folk, farmers and foresters and miners, movie actors and politicians and bankers—all use the same broad highways.

Some of you are no doubt now beginning to wonder whether you may not be in the wrong meeting; or at least what the trails of '49 and the highways of to-day have to do with farmers and books. The point is this: People who travel on the public roads want the best roads obtainable, the safest and the smoothest and usually the most direct. So they compromise their differences, consolidate their funds and construct a system of highways, permanent, extensive, continuous; and everybody travels thereon.

When it comes to the matter of furnishing books to farmers, and farmers' wives and farmers' hired men, we are acting upon the principles I have tried to indicate as being satisfactory with highways. We do not build highways for farmers—that would be too expensive; we do not organize libraries for farmers—that would be inadequate. But we construct roads for all the people; and we are well on the way towards a library system for everybody. It is true special attention is given farmers; but then we give special attention to everybody. I will tell you about the big plan as we see it and then about some of its special applications to the country folk.

We call it the county library plan, but a more definite title would be the Cali-

fornia library system. For while the county is the newer and perhaps the more startling development in our work, it is but one of the elements of which the municipal libraries and the state library are the others. But, of course, in considering the subject before us the county library is of greater moment.

I think it worth while briefly to recount to you what the framework of the county free library is, upon which we have built so successfully during the past few years, and something of the stage of development at which we have now arrived. Our present law was passed by the legislature of 1911, the previous act of 1909 having proved unsatisfactory of operation. The library is created by ordinance of the board of supervisors, the governing body of the county; and remains under the general control of that board, without the interposition of appointive trustees. Therein lies our first feature of great strength; because the supervisors, as the tax levying power, may the more readily be induced to give the library an adequate fund, since they are responsible for its success. The maximum tax rate is fixed by statute at one mill on the dollar of assessed valuation.

The county librarian is appointed by the board of supervisors; but since the law requires that candidates eligible for appointment must hold a certificate, issued by the board of library examiners only after a searching professional examination, the bugaboo of politics has been effectively banished. Under the direction of the librarian the county system is organized and developed: she has very wide professional latitude in the selection of books, the employment of assistants, the establishment of branches; and in the history of the service has almost without exception given entire satisfaction to her overlords, the supervisors, and to her patrons, the people.

Since this library plan was placed on our statute books forty-three of our fifty-eight counties have adopted it; to that number might well be added San Fran-

cisco which as a city and county has library service covering its entire area. Of the forty-three counties mentioned but thirty-eight have actually put the plan into operation, but the thirty-ninth will begin work July 1, and the fortieth on January 1, 1920. These thirty-eight counties spent last year a total of \$539,460; they have accumulated book collections numbering a million volumes; they have established throughout their territory almost 3,000 branches; they are serving about 1,700 of the 2,698 school districts within their borders and this number is increasing rapidly. For the first time in the history of the state an adequate school library service has been made possible for the boys and girls of the country—children for whose supposed library needs hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent, with the visible result of a few shelves of rags and tatters worn beyond recognition and certain sets of subscription works unused and unusable. That deplorable condition has been changed; and our country pupils where county library service is adopted have a constant supply of fresh books of the right kind, which they read themselves and take home for the use of their parents and adult brothers and sisters.

Turning now from this general survey of a library system designed to fill the wants of the entire population, let us consider what in particular it can do for the farmer folk. In the first place it will be quite evident that dotting the country side with library branches has made it infinitely easier for the tiller of the soil to secure books for recreation and for business. Furthermore in the selection of a custodian in each community the county librarian has not only sought for intelligence but also for that friendliness of spirit which would invite to the use of the books. These custodians are sedulously trained and encouraged to assist the borrowers in finding what they want or need, to consider that forwarding a request for special volumes or specific information to the county headquarters at

the county seat or on to the state library in Sacramento is not a bother but a privilege.

The person who is the prime mover in arousing interest, creating a demand, in satisfying the doubters and in awakening the satisfied is naturally the librarian. She must truly be all things to all men, women and children. One of these versatile individuals not only carried on the regular duties of her office, but also led the choral society and filled the Protestant pulpit when the war took the only available preacher away from her country town. I do not know where Mr. Howard Mumford Jones secured the models who sat for his lines on "The librarians," but I can assure you definitely it was not in California.

When the county librarian enters into her office in an unorganized county she must build up a library where none existed before. Frequently she must train a staff—for except in the more populous counties there is sometimes a prejudice against the immediate importation of trained talent (that fortunately wears off in time)—and she must make the acquaintance of the future users of her institution. You can appreciate some of the difficulties in the way of travel alone when you realize that if our 58 counties were equal in area, each would contain 2,730 square miles. Librarians in times past have not been considered perambulating personages, in fact they had a pretty definite, if not restricted, local habitation. With the county librarian, however, that practice is radically changed; she must be a traveler. To the extent that she does not travel, just to that extent she is a failure. Supervisors do not always appreciate the need and value of a first-class automobile in the development of library service, and sometimes let their librarians show their skill and prowess in subjugating an ill-tempered, common-property county machine. I know young women who, armed with a pair of broken pliers, have brought over mountain roads and after nightfall the wildest, most

treacherous contraptions that any automobile manufacturer could turn out. In time and gradually, however, the librarians are coaxing from their fiscal superiors more dependable cars, upon the sides of which are emblazoned the library insignia, so that the automobile and what it carries may be known and hailed and welcomed by teacher and pupil and farmer as it goes about the country in its daily service.

When the librarian enters her domain she usually finds a county official to whom she can turn for all kinds of assistance and in practice the assistance is not all on one side; that person is the farm adviser. He is a young man, young in spirit if not in years, and his work takes him over the county, into the homes, into the orchards and fields. The county librarians and the county farm advisers have effected an alliance, defensive and offensive. I have sometimes thought that this entente cordiale was promoted by the automobile which the adviser had and which the librarian wished to share. In the beginning that was perhaps the case; but a closer acquaintance and an understanding of the avenues for coöperation which lie before them soon develop a warm professional and personal admiration on both sides. Now when the farm adviser goes into the country he not infrequently takes the county librarian along; and almost invariably he carries a bundle of library books, technical volumes, which he distributes along his line of travel. His services are not those of the ordinary carrier; for he knows the rancher's needs and he places in his hands the literature which will be of immediate interest and value in the production of better crops or the growing of a finer quality of live stock. When the farm adviser has a meeting of farm folk the librarian is given an opportunity to talk books, books for recreation and books for business, books for the housewife, for the child, for the indoors, books for the husbandman and for the fields. Furthermore the librarian gener-

ally places a technical collection in the adviser's office and these volumes are given out to the farmer who has come in for special advice on his own problems and difficulties. It becomes in time a simple matter for dwellers in the country who have had this intelligent sort of library service to make full use, on their own initiative, of the county library branch in their neighborhood, or to call at the county headquarters when they motor into town.

Out of this coöperative association of farm adviser and county librarian, we have recently had a new development which promises great things. In every county there are several officials whose duties are promotional, cultural or in a practical way educational, and who much of the time are traveling about the county. One of our librarians not long ago was struck by the possibilities which might result from monthly meetings of these persons—the farm adviser, the county superintendent of schools, the district forester, the horticultural commissioner, the sealer of weights and measures, the emergency home demonstration agent, the county librarian. The plan is working. Each official is learning about the work of the others; each one sees possibilities of linking his service up in a coöperative way with that of the other; each one is a more intelligent public servant because of his understanding of the county program as a whole. The originator of this plan hit upon the very happy title of "county itinerants" as a designation for this body; but straightway some vigorous-minded individual among them translated the phrase into the "county tramps."

These county itinerant bodies are organized (if that word may be used) on the very loosest sort of plan. There are no initiation fees, no dues, no board of directors. Each county is more or less sufficient unto itself; each has its own program. There is no state organization, although in a way touch is maintained through certain state officers—the state

leader of the farm advisers, the state librarian, etc.

Another plan, which we are developing and which promises both economy and efficiency, is the collecting of special agricultural and horticultural books in the counties where certain industries are of great importance. In one county rice is predominant; in another, olives; in another, walnuts; in still another, citrus fruits, and so on. A better than ordinary collection on each of these subjects in the county where it is of prime interest will give us several special libraries. Our habits of freest interlibrary loans permit us to profit by such practice much more generously than would be the case if each library tried to meet its needs on all the subjects.

Here I think it timely to say that the function of the California State Library is to supplement the other libraries of our commonwealth. By not buying fiction or juvenile books our fund is left intact to purchase rare works, technical volumes, the unusual, the scholarly, or the expensive—publications which perhaps are seldom called for in any one city or county but for which throughout the state the demand is more or less constant. It is our contribution to the cause of coöperation.

With wheat at \$2.50, oranges at 85 cents, with hogs aspiring to aristocratic ranks and wool become a golden fleece indeed, with wine grapes holding their own even in the face of the irresistible prohibition onslaught, country life must inevitably take on added charms. Hired men may be hard to get and harder to keep; but the day of machinery is here and men of nerve and force will find it pleasant to live out of doors, to be their own masters and to get close to nature. The automobile and the good road are throwing a magic bridge over that slough of despond which once lay between the old farmstead and town. And the library bringing books of recreation and business to the rancher's door makes farming a surer undertaking and country life a fuller joy.